

Message Text

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44

ACTION ARA-10

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DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

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EO 11652: NA

TAGS: PFOR PINT ECON ENRG CO

SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND. COLOMBIANS, LOOKING TO THE NEW YEAR, EVINCE LESS CONCERN THAN THEY HAD A YEAR AGO ABOUT THEIR INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE NATION'S ECONOMY. THE LOPEZ SYLLE OF LEADERSHIP, IS NOW , IN CONTRAST TO JANUARY 1975, A KNOWN FACTOR; THERE IS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF GOVERNMENTAL ACHIEVEMENTS AND A GROWING UNDERSTANDING OF THE COURSE HE HAS CHOSEN. HOWEVER, THESE FACTORS, WHICH MIGHT, IN OTHER TIMES, ENGENDER CONFIDENCE

AND A SENSE OF NATIONAL PURPOSE, HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY OFFSET BY THE GROWING FEAR OF VIOLENCE. THE TRIAL OF THE ALLEGED KILLERS OF GENERAL RINCON COMMANDED WIDESPREAD ATTENTION. NAILESCHE COLOMBIAN PUBLIC IS NOT UNACCUSTOMED TO VIOLENCE, THE SECOND LOOK AT THE RINCON SLAYING DEEPENED THE CONCERN FOR PHYSICAL SECURITY WHICH IS NOW FELT AT ALL LEVELS OF THE COLOMBIAN SOCIETY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE ECONOMIC OUTLOOK, IMPROVED IN MANY WAYS--A LOWER INFLATION RATE BEING THE MOST IMPORTANT --NONETHELESS REMAINS

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CLOUDED BHZNUMEROUS UNCERTAINTIES,INCLUDING COLOMBIA'S

GROWING DEPENDENCE ON IMPORTED PETROLEUM. END SUMMARY.

2. COURT MARTIAL OF ALLEGED KILLERS OF GENERAL BEGINS.

ON JAN 5 PUBLIC COURT MARTIAL PROCEEDINGS BEGAN AGAINST EIGHT MEN ACCUSED OF PARTICIPATING IN THE ASSASSINATION OF ARMY GENERAL RINCON QUINONES (BOGOTA 8597). THE WEEK WAS DEVOTED TO THE MILITARY PROSECUTOR'S PRESENTATION. IN AN UNUSUAL DEPARTURE, HE POINTED TO ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ILLS OF THE COUNTRY AS BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RISE OF TERRORISM (ECHOING A THEME OF RETIRED ARMY COMMANDER VALENCIA TOVAR) AND CRITICIZED THE "POLITICAL CLASS" FOR THE LACK OF REMEDIAL ACTION. THE PROSECUTOR ALSO WOVE IN HARSH CRITICISM OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION AND CIVILIAN ATTORNEYS. THE PROSECUTION ALLEGED THAT THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN) PAID ONE MILLION PESOS TO THE ACCUSED FOR THE ASSASSINATION OF RINCON AND CLAIMED THAT THE ELN HAS A TOTAL OF 20 MILLION PESOS AVAILABLE FOR ADDITIONAL PAID KILLINGS. THE PROSECUTOR REVEALED THAT AUTHORITIES HAVE LEARNED OF THE EXISTENCE OF A TERRORIST UNIT CALLED "XL", SUPPORTED BY THE ELN AND THE COLOMBIAN REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES(FARC), WHICH IS ALLEGEDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR RECENT ASSASSINATIONS OF LOWER-RANKING POLICE AND MILITARY MEN. (THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME THIS NEW GROUP HAS EVER BEEN MENTIONED.) THE "XL" WAS ALSO ACCUSED OF MAKING DEATH AND KIDNAPPING THREATS AGAINST MILITARY MEMBERS OF THE COURT WITNESSES FOR THE PROSECUTION. THE PROSECUTION ENDED ITS PRESENTATION WITH THE UNEXPECTED RECOMMENDATION THAT TWO OF THE ACCUSED BE ABSOLVED FOR LACK OF EVIDENCE. IN A DRAMATIC BUT UNSUBSTANTIATED ASSERTION THE PROSECUTOR ANNOUNCED THAT THE STATE OF SIEGE WOULD BE LIFTED IN TWO DAYS, WHICH WOULD CAUSE THE CASE TO BE TRANSFERRED TO THE CIVIL COURTS AND, HE SAID, PLEASE AND THE DEFENSE ATTORNEYS. HIS COMMENT WAS A LIGHTLY VEILED CRITICISM OF CIVIL COURTS WHICH SUFFER THE REPUTATION OF BEING CORRUPT OR AT LEAST OVERLY LENIENT.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE ARMY, KNOWING OF AN IMMINENT END TO THE STATE OF SIEGE, HAS BEEN SPECTACULAR IN ITS PRESENTATION TO DRAW PUBLIC ATTENTION AND MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE CIVIL COURTS TO TREAT THE CASE LIGHTLY OR DISMISS IT THROUGH QUESTIONABLE MEANS WHEN JURISDICTION IS TRANSFERRED.

3. PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENTS. A COLOMBIAN TEAM WILL LEAVE MONDAY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FOR CARACAS TO NEGOTIATE THE PURCHASE OF VENEZUELAN CRUDE. ALTHOUGH SEVERAL FIGURES ON THE 1976 PETROLEUM DEFICIT HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS (70 MILLION DOLLARS GASOLINE IMPORTS AND 10 TO 15 THOUSAND B/D CRUDE IMPORTS), THE MINISTRY OF MINES HAS NOT ISSUED FORMAL ESTIMATES. THE MINISTER OF MINES TOLD THE PRESS THIS WEEK THAT GASOLINE PRICES WOULD CONTINUE TO BE INCREASED MONTHLY IN 1976 AND THAT THERE WOULD BE A PUBLIC INFORMATION CAMPAIGN TO URGE

ENERGY SAVINGS. WHILE SEVERAL GOC OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED DOUBTS TO US REGARDING TO EFFECTIVENESS OF A CAMPAIGN, THEY DO BELIEVE IT WILL LESSEN PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE FUEL PRICE INCREASES. SINCE THE MONTHLY GASOLINE PRICE CHANGES BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER, THE PRICE OF REGULAR GASOLINE HAS INCREASED BY 54 PERCENT.

VAKY

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